

Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

Following is a transcript of President Carter's news conference yesterday in Washington, as recorded by The New York Times by The New York Times through the facilities of ABC News:

PRESIDENT CARTER: Miss Thomas.

1. Soviet Brigade and Treaty

Q. Do you think you have defused the problem, or issue, of the Soviet brigade in Cuba and satisfied those who seek a bigger defense budget enough now to win SALT's ratification this year? And if so, how?

A. Probably SALT will be ratified this year, basically, on its own merit. It's obvious to me that the SALT treaty is in the best interests of our country.

It enhances the security of the United States; it contributes to world peace; it will strengthen our own alliances; it will preserve our place as a leader of the Western world; it will let it be more easy for us to control the spread of nuclear explosives all over the world.

In my opinion, we have answered the question of the Soviet combat unit in Cuba adequately. I think we've isolated any threat from that unit. We'll increase our surveillance there and I believe that this, obviously, has been an important issue for us to address. I believe it's been addressed adequately.

As far as the defense budget it concerned, that still must be resolved. I'm committed to a 3 percent real growth in our defense. I have maintained that position for the last three years — it's important to us, to our allies, to American strength. If I see a need for increased defense programs, I would not hesitate to recommend this to the Congress.

3. Kissinger Statements

Q. Mr. President, what is your reaction to Dr. Kissinger's statement that the Soviet troops in Cuba are the first organized hostile force in this hemisphere since the Monroe Doctrine that we've accepted and also, Mr. President, do you feel that the Soviet troops in Cuba symbolize the growing expansionism of Russia, the Soviet Union?

A. The troops in Cuba have been there for a long time. I think that the ah, I've not read Secretary Kissinger's speech, I've read news reports of it. Its basic premises are compatible with my own, that the presence of a Soviet combat unit there is a serious matter which

I think we have addressed as best we could. Secondly, that this is not the most important matter of all, that above and beyond that it's important to recognize and to do what we can to contain Cuban interventionism or adventurism around the world.

As you know this began primarily with the entrance of several tens, more than ten, more than the ten thousand bodies of troops from Cuba into Angola in 1975 before I was President. We do look upon this as a major threat.

I have not seen any reports that Secretary Kissinger recommended different moves from the ones that I outlined to the nation on the evening of October the first. So we do share a common concern. I think that our response was measured and appropriate. I do not favor the Soviets expand, uh extending their arm of influence to the Cubans or anyone else around the world. This has been part of the history of the Soviet Union.

We attempt to meet them and compete with them adequately, in my opinion, on a peaceful basis. And in my judgment, if we can control the military expenditures and have equality, have arms control, in my judgment we can compete with the Soviets on a peaceful basis with an excellent prospect for victory.

The Soviets represent a totalitarian nation. They, we are committed to peace and freedom and democracy. The Soviets subjugate the rights of an individual human being to the rights of the state; we do just the opposite. The Soviets are an atheistic nation; we have deep and fundamental religious beliefs. The Soviets have a primary emphasis on the military aspect of their economy; ours is much more broad-based to give the benefits of economic growth to individual human beings.

So I believe that in addition to that, our raising the standard of human rights and the honoring of national aspirations — not trying to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries — gives us an additional advantage in the peaceful competition with the Soviets. So I don't have any fear of, or any trepidation about, that intense competition with the Soviets on a peaceful basis. I obviously want the same thing that President Brezhnev wants — that is, the avoidance of a nuclear war. So we have some things in common — the avoidance of war. We have other things in common — a willingness to compete; we've got advantages over them that I hope to utilize in the future as we have

17. Soviet Stand on Arms

Q. Mr. President, going back to your comments about competition with the Soviet Union with regard to arms. Would you support NATO deployment of the Pershing missile to counter the SS-20 and if I could add another question there, do you have any reaction to President Brezhnev's conditional offer on arms reduction in Central Europe?

A. Our allies and we are carefully assessing the significance of President Brezhnev's statement. However I'd like to point out that what he's offering in effect, is to continue their own rate of modernization as it has been, provided we don't modernize at all.

They have had an actual reduction in launchers the last few years. They've been replacing their old SS-4's and SS-5's with the SS-20, not on a one-for-one basis. But the SS-20 has three warheads; the old missiles only had one warhead. The SS-20 has a much greater range. It can reach our Western allies' countries as a target even if it's located in the central part of Russia. It's three to six times as accurate as the old missiles which it replaced. And in addition to that it's mobile; that is it can be located specifically and destroyed with a pre-emptive strike if that should become desirable on the part of allies.

They also have replaced all older airplanes with the Backfire bomber. So it's not quite as constructive a proposal as at first blush it seems to be. I think it's an effort designed to disarm the willingness or eagerness of our allies adequately to defend themselves. In my judgment the decision ought to be made to modernize the Western allies' military strength and then negotiate with a full commitment and determination mutually to lower armaments on both sides — the Warsaw Pact and the NATO countries — so that we can retain equivalency of military strength, equity of military strength and have a lower overall level of armaments.

This is what we hope to achieve. I might point out that Chancellor Schmidt said, I believe yesterday or the day before, that a prerequisite to a decision by our NATO allies to take these steps, which he considers to be vital for the security of NATO, is the passage of SALT II. So, if we can be successful in controlling existing strategic Soviet and United States atomic weapons through SALT II, then we'll move in the next step to reducing the nuclear weapons which don't have intercontinental range. And along with that we'll continue with our mutual and balanced force reduction effort to reduce conventional arms. It's an interesting proposal and one that might show promise. We're assessing it carefully. But it's not as great a step as would ordinarily be the judgment at first.